

Stay Awake and Be Ready!

In the gospel reading for the [32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time](#), Jesus offers a parable of warning. Often called the parable of the foolish virgins, it is a story that is familiar to many. The lesson seems to be obvious: “you know neither the day nor the hour” when the bridegroom will arrive, so a wise person must be vigilant and awake.

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians speaks of those who have fallen asleep in Christ. Taken together, the epistle and the gospel could stand as a kind of memento mori, reminding us of our own mortality and our need to be in constant preparation for death. At the same time, we are nearing the end of the liturgical year and some may choose to read the parable in an eschatological way, calling us to always be ready for the end times.



These reminders of the inevitability of death and the end of the age are certainly valuable and their warnings help us to review our current lives and seek to place greater emphasis on being prepared for meeting Jesus. But I personally feel called to read Paul and Jesus a little differently because of the readings from the Hebrew Scriptures. These initial scriptural passages are filled with joy and sumptuous language. The reading from the Book of Wisdom is actually one of my favorite images; in it we hear about God’s Holy Wisdom in the imagery of a mysterious and often unseen woman whom we desire to meet.

The Psalmist sings for us: “My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God. O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.” While this may be a sentiment felt by the dying, the words sound to me like someone desperately seeking to live this life to its fullest. The Book of Wisdom then portrays for us a God who is resplendent and worthy of our desire and pursuit, but this vision of God is not always easy to see and we are advised to keep vigil for she will arrive unexpectedly seeking us.

While we can see the arrival of the Bridegroom as an end to life or this world, I see his arrival as a beginning. The Bridegroom of Jesus’ parable has come to celebrate and to begin a new life with his beloved. Those who were there at the doorstep, waiting and prepared, get to enter into the room of celebration alongside the Bridegroom and to be in his company as he inaugurates a new family. This echoes the situation in the Book of Wisdom where Holy Wisdom is unexpectedly found waiting for us.

The ten maidens are missing out on the opportunity to see and enter a relationship with the Bridegroom in the here and now. Those “foolish” women are missing out on the sublime and transformational experience of having God’s Holy Wisdom revealed to them in truth, beauty, and joy, on the opportunity to experience what the Psalmist longs for in this world.

The parable's warning about not knowing the day or the hour—read in the context of the Psalmist's thirst for God and the vision of the elusive Holy Wisdom finding the seeker—is a reminder that we do not know when or where our own thirsting and seeking will be met by the God who is seeking us. This is not a moment reserved solely for the end of our lives; rather, whenever this moment does occur, surely it will be the beginning of a new and deeper relationship with God.

As I reflect on the Franciscan tradition, I see many great saints who found God as Bridegroom and Holy Wisdom well before the end of their earthly lives. Francis, Bonaventure, Clare, and countless Franciscans over the last eight centuries have been transformed by being awake in the darkness of this world, waiting and hoping to encounter God in the here and now.

Our liturgical year is fascinating because even though we Christians think about time very linearly with a beginning and an end, we celebrate the mystery of God's presence among us in a cyclical way. Just two weeks after we hear these readings, we will celebrate the wisdom that Christ is the King of the Universe and we will hear Jesus speak about the judgment that will come at the end of our lives and the end of time. The following Sunday, we will hear the Prophet Isaiah speak of the ancient Hebrews yearning for God's presence and Jesus will begin another parable with the words, "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come."

I am inspired to think that we are being called to hear the Scriptures over the next few weeks not only as about preparing for the end, but as an invitation to be awake and on watch for a beginning; be awake and alert for the arrival of the Bridegroom, Holy Wisdom, and be ready to celebrate a joyful beginning. Being watchful and alert could look like attending a peaceful rally calling for a ceasefire in the Holy Land, as FAN staff and friends attended last week. Being prepared can look like advocating for those dealing with environmental racism in their community. If we can be prepared in this life to meet the God who seeks us as much as we seek him, whenever that moment is to occur, then we can rest assured that we will be among the rewarded faithful of which Paul writes.

Tobias Harkleroad, OFS
Secular Franciscan and FAN Supporter

Suggested Action:

Meditate on the readings this week and contemplate how you will prepare yourself for the beginning to come. Take action by joining our environmental justice webinar next week or the anti-trafficking prayer service tomorrow. (See details below.)

Suggested Petitions:

May all people be prepared to meet God who graciously seeks us, we pray...
May all people in violent war-torn countries work toward peace and justice, we pray...

Prayer for Hope and Peace from [Loyola Press](#):

**Heavenly father, I am your humble servant,
I come before you today in need of hope.
I need hope for a calm and joyful future.
I need hope for love and kindness.**

I pray for peace and safety.
Some say that the sky is at its
darkest just before the light.
I pray that this is true, for today seems stormy and dim.
I need your light, Lord, in every way.
I pray to be filled with your light.
Help me to walk in your light, and live
my life in faith and service.
In your name I pray,

Amen.

FAN Shows Up for Peace

Last week, FAN staff joined Catholic and other Christian peacemakers for a “pray-in” outside the White House to call on President Joe Biden, a Catholic, to abide by Jesus’s way of courageous love and heed Pope Francis’s plea to take the side of peace in the Israel-Gaza conflict. Calls were made to urge all parties to de-escalate hostilities, abide by an immediate ceasefire, and release all hostages. Speakers offered prayers for All Saints Day and All Souls Day, remembering all who have died and prayed for all Israelis and Palestinians who are suffering, have been injured, and have died in the war.



Articles about the event:

- [Sight Magazine](#)
- [Independent Catholic News](#)
- [Religion News Service](#)
- [National Catholic Reporter](#)
- [Sojourners](#)
- [Bishop John Stowe Op-Ed](#)

Please check out our [FAN Shows Up](#) web page to see other rallies and events we have attended. More actions are coming up, including this week, in Washington DC. Please email us at info@franciscanaction.org to be notified.

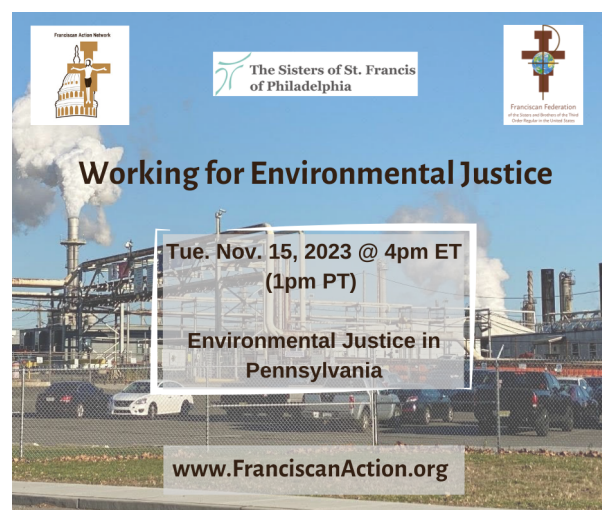
We invite you to take action in whatever way you can. Here is an [action alert](#) from Sisters of Mercy to send President Biden a message and another [action alert](#) from Churches for Middle East Peace to message your congresspersons.

Webinar: Environmental Justice for Pennsylvania

Please join us on **Wednesday, November 15 at 4pm ET (1pm PT)** to learn about environmental injustices in Chester, Pennsylvania, site of one of the largest trash incinerators in the country (operated by Covanta Delaware Valley). Hear what the residents of Chester are demanding and how you can support them in environmental justice advocacy. [Register to attend here](#). **This event will be recorded and all registrants will receive a link.**

Our speakers will be **Zulene Mayfield** of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living (CRCQL), **Dr. Giovanna Di Chiro** of Swarthmore College, and **Chris Folk**, student activist from the Campus Coalition Concerning Chester (C4).

The majority low-income Black and Brown residents of Chester, Pennsylvania experience disproportionate adverse effects on health and quality of life from the pollution released by one of the largest trash incinerators in the country, in addition to a sewage waste treatment facility, chemical manufacturing plants, and other polluting industries located in this historic city on the Delaware River. [Learn more](#).



New Monthly Anti-Trafficking Prayer Service

Recently, the USCCB created a special working group dedicated to Anti-Trafficking Education and Outreach. They will host a new monthly prayer service on the 8th of each month per the date of St. Josephine Bakhita's Feast Day in February. The mission is to bring awareness each month of the year to issues that intersect with human trafficking.

The launch of this initiative is **tomorrow, November 8 at 2pm ET (11am PT) on Zoom** when the prayer service will focus on National Runaway Prevention Month to raise awareness on experiences of youth who have run away and who have experienced homelessness. Join the monthly prayer services at this recurring [Bakhita Prayer Service Zoom Link](#).



Additionally, the group has produced two resources: A [St. Josephine Prayer Card](#) and an [Anti-Trafficking Calendar for 2024](#).

Climate Updates in Preparation for COP28

Last week, FAN joined a coalition of Catholic organizations and more than 1200 people across the U.S. Catholic community in signing a [letter](#) to the U.S. Administration asking that the forgiveness and restructuring of debt be placed as solutions within the agenda for COP28. The delivery of the letter was met providentially with the news that Pope Francis [plans to attend](#) COP28 in person December 1-3.

Interfaith Power and Light has developed a petition thanking Pope Francis for advocating for bold action on climate concerns, recognizing progress made by President Biden's Administration and urging the EPA to follow through on proposed rules for a healthier world. [Sign on by clicking here.](#)



New Toolkit: Thank Cosponsors of Afghan Adjustment Act

As we enter the holiday season, we [express our gratitude](#) to all members of Congress who have stepped up to support our new Afghan neighbors by co-sponsoring the Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA).

Over 90% of Afghans who were evacuated to the U.S. in 2021 remain in limbo without permanent status. The AAA would provide them with an essential pathway to lawful permanent residence and eventual citizenship.



The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC) and Evacuate Our Allies Coalition have created a new [toolkit](#) for constituents to thank their members of Congress who have co-sponsored the AAA or to encourage them to become a co-sponsor if they aren't yet. View and share the toolkit with your networks: [bit.ly/AAAFall23](#)

Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

Carolyn Townes, OFS, is a Secular Franciscan, previous JPIC animator of the Order, and member of the nationwide virtual Franciscan Justice Circle. She invites all to a *virtual celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Greccio Nativity* on **Sunday, Nov. 19 at 3pm ET/12pm PT** hosted by the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. The event will be approximately 90 minutes and requires registration. [Click here for more details and to register.](#)

FJC Meetings this week:

Mid-Hudson Valley FJC: Tues. Nov. 7 at 12:00pm Eastern on zoom



Kansas FJC: Tues. Nov. 7 at 7:00pm Central on zoom

Monthly National FJC Call: Wed. Nov. 8 at 4:00pm Eastern / 1pm Pacific on zoom

CT-RI FJC: Wed. Nov. 8 at 7:00pm Eastern on zoom

Northern California FJC: Wed. Nov. 8 at 7:00pm Pacific on zoom

Rochester, NY-area FJC: Thurs. Nov. 9 at 3:30pm Eastern on zoom

New York City-Area FJC: Thurs. Nov. 9 at 7:30pm Eastern on zoom

SoCal FJC: Thurs. Nov. 9 at 6:00pm Pacific on zoom

DC-Area FJC: Sat. Nov. 11 at 10:00am Eastern in person

If you would like to connect with any of these Circles or learn more, please contact FAN staff, [Nora Pfeiffer](#).